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DEPT. FOR EUR/WE, EUR/PD/PA

FROM EMBASSY VATICAN/MESSAGE NO. 113/01

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [VT](#) [VTBIO](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN - POST WORKS TO BUILD CONSENSUS ON AG-
SCIENCE ETHICS

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SUMMARY

11. THE VATICAN'S CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM ABOUT BIOTECHNOLOGY WAS GIVEN A BOOST BY A JULY 5 MEETING POST ORGANIZED BETWEEN SENIOR GOVERNMENT EXPERTS AND DR. CHANNAPATNA PRAKASH, PROFESSOR OF PLANT MOLECULAR GENETICS AT TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY, ALABAMA AND MEMBER OF THE USDA'S AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY ADVISORY COMMITTEE. THE VATICAN CONFIRMED THAT IT HAS FEWER PROBLEMS WITH THE SCIENCE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY THAN WITH THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ETHICAL ISSUES LINKED TO THE PROCESSES. THE PROTAGONISTS AGREED THAT BIOTECHNOLOGY HAD THE POTENTIAL TO COMBAT WORLD HUNGER BY DEVELOPING DISEASE AND PEST RESISTANT PLANTS. VATICAN OFFICIALS EXPRESSED PARTICULAR INTEREST IN THE PROCESSES TO INCREASE THE NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF SOME GRAINS AND PLANTS. THE VATICAN APPROACH TO BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIO-ETHICS IN GENERAL IS BASED ON "REASONABLE PRUDENCE." POST ARRANGED VATICAN MEDIA EVENTS TO FURTHER DISSEMINATE PRAKASH'S MESSAGE. END SUMMARY.

LOVE THE IDEA, BUT...

12. MEMBERS AND CONSULTANTS OF THE VATICAN'S BIO-ETHICAL INSTITUTE, THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE, DISCUSSED THE PROS AND CONS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY WITH PROFESSOR CHANNAPATNA PRAKASH DURING A JULY 5 MEETING ORGANIZED BY POST IN VATICAN CITY. THE SCIENTIFIC ENCOUNTER WAS CHAIRED BY THE VATICAN'S
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"MINISTER" FOR BIO-ETHICAL ISSUES, BISHOP ELIO SGRECCIA. SGRECCIA WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER THE VATICAN'S REFLECTION ON BIOTECHNOLOGY AND FROM THE START OF THE MEETING IT WAS CLEAR THAT VATICAN PARTICIPANTS WERE, IN THEORY, FAVORABLE TO THE BENEFITS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY, PARTICULARLY FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS. THE SCIENTISTS DID EXPRESS CONCERN OVER THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF GMOS AS PRODUCTS OF DOMINEERING WESTERN MULTINATIONALS, OFTEN LABELED AS "DIABOLICAL." PONTIFICAL ACADEMY MEMBERS SUGGESTED THAT DEVELOPING NATIONS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED AND ASSISTED TO DEVELOP IN-HOUSE SOLUTIONS TO THEIR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE PROBLEMS. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT ABOUT THE POTENTIAL OF BIOTECHNOLOGY BUT THE VATICAN DELEGATION INSISTED ON ADEQUATE CONTROLS TO MANAGE EXTRINSIC RISKS. PRAKASH POINTED OUT THAT IN THE US THE EPA, USDA AND FDA KEEP CLOSE SCRUTINY ON NEW BIOTECH PRODUCTS. ALL AGREED THAT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING IMPACTED DIRECTLY ON THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF BIOTECHNOLOGY AND GMOS.

13. THE VATICAN DELEGATION INSISTED THAT EACH NEW BIOTECH PRODUCT SHOULD RECEIVE A SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL. IT REJECTED THE IDEA OF A GENERAL APPROVAL OF GMOS. THEY ALSO CALLED FOR COUNTRY SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL. ONE ACADEMICIAN POINTED OUT THAT ONLY 20 PERCENT OF U.S. LAND IS DEDICATED TO AGRICULTURE COMPARED TO 80 PERCENT OF ITALY'S. HE OPINED THAT THE RISK FACTOR IN A NEW BIOTECH PRODUCT WAS GREATER FOR A COUNTRY LIKE ITALY THAN FOR THE US. THE VATICAN DELEGATES SAID THEIR APPROACH TO GENETIC SCIENCES IN GENERAL WAS GLOBAL IN NATURE AND THAT THEY CONSISTENTLY PUT THE INTERESTS OF PEOPLE FIRST. THE MEETING CONCLUDED WITH A WORKING LUNCH HOSTED BY BISHOP SGRECCIA.
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MEDIA COVERAGE

14. POST ARRANGED FOR DR. PRAKASH TO BE INTERVIEW BY VATICAN RADIO. THE RECORDED INTERVIEW WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AT THE STATION. THESE INCLUDE TRANSMISSIONS TO THE MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA, INDIA, PAKISTAN, SOUTHEAST ASIA, AND THE PACIFIC. PRAKASH WAS ALSO

INTERVIEWED BY THE VATICAN BUREAU OF CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE (CNS), THE MEDIA ARM OF THE US BISHOPS CONFERENCE. CNS PROVIDES SYNDICATED VATICAN NEWS TO CATHOLIC MEDIA OUTLETS AROUND THE WORLD.

COMMENT

14. PRAKASH'S VISIT WAS GREATLY APPRECIATED BY THE VATICAN, HAVING BEEN PREVIOUSLY SANCTIONED BY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. PONTIFICAL ACADEMY EXPERT, BISHOP ELIO SGRECCIA, EXPRESSED HIS SATISFACTION THAT POST HAD FACILITATED A SERIOUS SCIENTIFIC ENCOUNTER TO FURTHER THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY'S REFLECTION ON THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY. EXTENSIVE VATICAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE VISIT AND DR. PRAKASH'S MESSAGE HAS PROVIDED A STIMULUS FOR A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN VATICAN-RELATED

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	COME-00
	CTME-00	DODE-00	ITCE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	EXME-00
	E-00	UTED-00	VC-00	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01	TEDE-00
	INR-00	ITC-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00
	OES-01	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00
	P-00	SCT-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00
	USIE-00	SNIS-00	NISC-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-02	G-00
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CIRCLES WORLDWIDE. U.S. BASED AGRICULTURAL COMPANIES HAVE ASKED EMBASSY VATICAN FOR ASSISTANCE ON THIS ISSUE. BIOTECHNOLOGY IS ONE IMPORTANT U.S. INDUSTRY WHICH EMBASSY VATICAN CAN ACTIVELY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY SUPPORT WITH HOST COUNTRY. MERANTE

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